



Township of Dawn-Euphemia

Florence Fairgrounds Master Plan



Florence Fairgrounds-Master Plan

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Map

Florence Fairgrounds- Proposed Improvements

1.0 **Background**

1.1 Setting

The Florence Fairgrounds is an important part of the Township's parks system and comprises an eleven acre parcel of land providing recreational facilities and parkland. The Fairgrounds are located in Florence and are situated on the south side of Mill Street.

1.2 Historical Context

The Fairgrounds were originally purchased from David Wright in 1909 by the Florence Agricultural Society. In 1910, the Fairgrounds hosted the first Florence Fair. The Fair continued until 1987 where it became a victim of declining attendance, reduced provincial grants and higher costs. The Fair was later replaced by the Grand Ole Power Days, which is an exhibition of antique farm tractors and equipment that features a tractor pull sponsored by the Sydenham Antique Club.

Throughout its history, several upgrades took place including the installation of stone gates, the construction of a grandstand and the completion of the "Crystal Palace" where farm produce was displayed and judged. The Fairgrounds has hosted hundreds of family reunions and get-togethers in conjunction with a wide array of social events such as Florence Minor Baseball. It has been a popular location for many community groups such as the Boy Scouts and the Sydenham and District Antique Club.

The Florence Community Centre was constructed in 1958 on the Fairgrounds. The original structure was 6,000 square feet in area and included a kitchen, stage and polished cement floor. Over the years, renovations were carried out to the community centre resulting in the addition of approximately 1,200 square feet to the building. Other renovations included a new roof, wiring, water filter system, a new furnace and the installation of air conditioning. The Florence Community Centre had been the focus of numerous community functions and events including, dances, banquets, family reunions, wedding receptions, card parties, community and group meetings, stag and doe events, church dinners, graduations, funeral receptions, Christmas dinners, clinics, auctions, elections and Grand Ole Power Days.

In 2004 and 2005, Council directed that building condition and structural reports be prepared for the Florence Community Centre. These reports identified a number of building deficiencies with respect to the fire and building codes. In 2006, Council appointed a "Business Plan Committee" to prepare a Business Plan for the future of the Florence Community Centre. The Committee recommended to Council was that a new community centre be built that could

accommodate up to 280 persons and that the facility include a library, kitchen, washrooms, storage area and meeting rooms.

In 2009 work started on a new community centre and in 2010, the Florence Community Centre was demolished and the new Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre opened. The new community centre is an 8,600 square foot facility that includes a community hall capable of supporting 211 persons (270 persons when combined with the meeting room), a meeting room having a capacity of 59 persons, an expanded library, storage area, kitchen and washrooms.

1.3 Value of the Florence Fairgrounds

The Fairgrounds is a property of unlimited potential for the Township of Dawn-Euphemia. It is home to the annual Grand Ole Power Days, and has been the site of many recreational and social activities and events. With the completion of the Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre, the Fairgrounds became even more important as collectively, they can act as a strong social hub for the community and surrounding area.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this master plan is to provide a document which will help guide the Township in the re-development and revitalization of the Fairgrounds.

2.0 Strengths, Concerns/Weaknesses and Opportunities

This section summarizes the strengths, concerns and opportunities associated with the Florence Fairgrounds.

2.1 Strengths:

The Fairgrounds property has several strengths. First of all is its size. It is a large parcel of land totalling eleven (11) acres. Secondly, it has a strong historical tie to the community as it was previously the site of the Florence Fair and today is the site of the annual Grand Ole Power Days. Thirdly, it is a centralized location as it is within a short drive of a number of municipalities. The Fairgrounds has a volunteer base, as for a number of years the Florence Optimist Club managed the ball diamonds and a concession booth.

2.2 Concerns/Weaknesses:

A number of concerns are prevalent for the Fairgrounds. First of all, while the volunteer base is present, it has been declining. This is a concern because of the heavy reliance on this base to administer programs. Expanding the volunteer base is crucial to the success of program administration. Another issue

is that since it is a centralized location, there is a concern that other municipalities are needed for patronage as Dawn-Euphemia lacks the necessary population in order to solely support the Fairgrounds for social and recreational activities.

2.3 Opportunities:

This master plan marks the beginning of many opportunities for the Fairgrounds property. First of all, there is opportunity to improve infrastructure through revitalization. Once the area is revitalized, then partnerships can be explored with community groups and local and area schools that are interested in programming recreational activities at the Fairgrounds.

3.0 Goal and Objectives

3.1. Goal

The goal of this document is to present recommendations that will aid in the revitalization and effective management of the Florence Fairgrounds.

3.2. Objectives

To help obtain this goal, the following objectives have been adopted.

- To provide facilities that will be beneficial for the residents of the Township of Dawn-Euphemia;
- To provide a safe and functional area that will encourage activity by residents, visitors and community groups; and
- To provide active outdoor recreational opportunities and activities.

4.0 Facilities

The following is a list of the facilities located at the Fairgrounds and each are described in more detail below:

- Picnic Shelter
- Ball Diamonds
- Outdoor Rink
- Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre
- Storage Building
- Tractor Pull Track
- Parking Lot

- Concession Booth
- Children's playground

4.1 Picnic Shelter

A picnic shelter is located immediately west of the Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre. The shelter is maintained by the Township of Dawn-Euphemia and is in a good state of repair. Its close proximity to the community centre makes it the ideal location for barbecuing or picnics.

4.2 Ball Diamonds

There are two ball diamonds located on the Fairgrounds. Historically, the diamonds were used by the Florence Athletic Association as baseball was an extremely popular recreation activity in the past. The ball diamonds have fallen into disrepair over the past few years as interest in baseball in the area has greatly diminished. The ball diamonds have generally not been booked for use during the past two years.

4.3 Outdoor Rink

The outdoor rink located on the grounds, is maintained by the Florence Optimist Club and the Township. Local athletic groups constructed an outdoor rink complete with boards and cement floor for informal games of ice hockey in the winter and ball hockey the rest of the year. The facility is not booked by the municipality and is available to area residents on a "first come first served" basis. In 2011, Township Council began discussions with the Florence Optimist Club in regards to flooding the rink in the winter for hockey and skating.

4.4 Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre

The Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre was opened in June 2010. It is an 8,600 square foot multi-use facility that includes a community hall capable of accommodating 211 persons (270 persons when combined with the meeting room), a meeting room having a capacity of 59 persons, an expanded library, storage area, commercial kitchen and washrooms.

4.5 Storage Building

A storage building is located in the northwest corner of the park. The building is used by the Township, Sydenham Antique Club and the Florence Sydenham District Optimist Club to store materials and equipment.

4.6 Tractor Pull Track

There is a tractor pull track located southeast of the community centre. This track is used during Grand Ole Days and for other truck and tractor pull events.

It is comprised of a dirt track and safety barriers consisting of concrete abutments that run parallel on both sides of the track. There are ten seating structures located along the track that are owned by the Florence and Sydenham District Optimist Club.

4.7 Parking Lot

The parking lot includes both gravel and paved areas and is capable of accommodating approximately two hundred vehicles.

4.8 Concession Booth

There is a concession booth located on the Fairgrounds near the most westerly ball diamond. This facility is maintained and operated by the Florence Optimist Club for a variety of occasions. The Township has assumed responsibility for hydro costs at the concession booth.

4.9 Children's Playground

The Florence and Sydenham District Optimist Club in partnership with the Township installed a children's playground in 2013, to the south of the storage shed. The Optimist Club has now installed amenities at the playground including a picnic table, patio area, benches, landscaping and garbage receptacles.

5.0 Management Plan

5.1 Management Structure

The current management structure of the Florence Fairgrounds should be examined. Currently the Township of Dawn-Euphemia owns the property and manages certain elements of the grounds including grass cutting, the community centre, the storage shed and picnic shelter and maintenance of the ball diamonds and tractor pull track. The Florence Optimist Club looks after the outdoor rink and the concession booth. In 2013, the Florence and Sydenham District Optimist Club asked Council to assume responsibility for the hydro costs associated with operating the concession booth. Moving forward with the enhancement and revitalization of the Fairgrounds the following management approach is recommended:

Operate and Manage the Fairgrounds with Existing Staff

Operating and managing all facilities at the Fairgrounds with existing staff is a further option. This option is considered to be the most practical approach for the Township. The Florence Fairgrounds is owned by the Township of Dawn-Euphemia and is managed in part by the Florence and Sydenham District Optimist Club. While it is noteworthy that the Optimists have informally partnered with the Township to manage the Fairgrounds; the Township needs to take a

more comprehensive and active role in managing and maintaining the Fairgrounds property and all of the facilities in it. It is desirable that the Township assumes all management and operational responsibilities of the Fairgrounds subject to use agreements with volunteer groups.

From a liability perspective this would be the wisest approach.

One way of helping to achieve this is through the adoption of a Parks and Recreation By-Law. A Parks and Recreation By-Law would give the Township the basis to establish standardized rules and regulations regarding the use of all municipal parks and recreational areas in the Township. For example, the Township of Brooke Alvinston, the Town of Petrolia, and the Township of Lucan-Biddulph have all passed Parks and Recreation By-Laws which focus on establishing rules and regulations for park usage.

In 2014, Council agreed to establish a Recreation Facilities Advisory Committee to provide advice to Council on operating the Shetland Park and the Florence Fairgrounds and Community Centre. A terms of reference for the Committee was approved in 2014. Advertising for Committee members was carried out in 2015. Unfortunately there was very limited community interest expressed to participate on the Committee and the Committee has not yet been activated. This initiative should continue to be pursued in 2015. Community Interest in participating on the Committee can be sought in the fall tax flyer.

5.2 Potential Funding Sources

The Township will seek out applicable Provincial and Federal Funding programs and private sector grant programs to assist in implementing the projects identified in this Master Plan. Funding will be appropriated by Township Council as appropriate through the approval of future capital budgets. Partnerships with community groups and organizations will also be pursued to assist with funding various improvements at the Fairgrounds that are consistent with the Master Plan. In 2013, the Township successfully partnered with the Florence and Sydenham District Optimist Club to develop a children's playground at the Florence Fairgrounds.

6.0 Implementation Strategy and Proposed Improvements

The following are recommended improvements which are organized into short, medium and long term initiatives.

6.1 Short Term Initiatives:

Short term initiatives should be considered for implementation within one to three years of the official adoption of this plan. They are as follows:

- **Increase the number of waste receptacles and recycling bins placed throughout the Fairgrounds.**
- **Enhance landscaping around the Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre and along the Mill Street frontage.**
- **Improve naturalization within the Fairgrounds by strategically planting trees and shrubs.**
- **Increase the number of picnic tables.**
- **Complete a soccer pitch by installing goal posts.**
- **Renovate the concession booth, repair the dents and remove the graffiti.**
- **Arrange for portable toilets to be placed at the Fairgrounds during the summer season.**
- **Adapt the outdoor rink for other sports such as shuffleboard and basketball.**

Rationale for Improvements:

Throughout the history of the Florence Fairgrounds, it has been the site of many social and outdoor gatherings. The proposed improvements seek to re-establish the property as a site that fosters this. Improving the Fairgrounds through initiatives like tree, flower and shrub planting, and adding more picnic tables and waste receptacles and recycling bins will improve the functionality and aesthetics of Fairgrounds and will greatly assist in re-establishing the Fairgrounds as a destination for outdoor social events and family gatherings.

The first set of infrastructure improvements involved the installation of a children's playground in 2013. It is also proposed that a soccer pitch be installed. Even though it is not regulation size, soccer could be played providing the installation of goal posts be completed. Soccer is an extremely popular sport, and establishing a pitch at the Fairgrounds is another sports related option that can be made available.

The concession booth has historically been used and maintained by the Florence and Sydenham District Optimist Club for a variety of activities. Despite this arrangement, there are many dents on the aluminium structure and graffiti can be found throughout. The booth needs to be repaired and graffiti removed. The Township has recently assumed responsibility for the hydro costs associated with the concession booth.

It is also appropriate that the outdoor rink be considered for other compatible sports such as shuffleboard and basketball. Lines for a shuffleboard court and a basketball key can be painted on the surface and a portable basketball net can be considered.

Cost Estimation:

The installation of goal posts that measure 6.5'X18' with netting installed will cost approximately \$5,000. In terms of the concession booth, it is estimated that the minor repairs will cost between \$500.00 and \$1,000.00. Painting lines on the rink surface is estimated to be \$1,000 and a suitable portable basketball net would cost approximately \$350.00.

6.2 Medium Term Initiatives:

Medium term initiatives should be implemented in three to five years following adoption of this master plan.

- **Improvements to the outdoor rink.**
- **Build permanent outdoor washrooms.**
- **Adapt the floor of the former Florence Community Centre, for recreational activities such as children's tennis and basketball.**

Rationale for Improvements:

- Outdoor Rink Improvements

Currently the outdoor rink is used informally on a "first come first served" basis. In this regard, the rink is vastly underutilized. In order to encourage player safety, benches are needed. The rink is a valuable piece of infrastructure and has potential to be used year round; for ball hockey in the fall, spring and summer, and ice hockey/skating in the winter.

- Outdoor Washrooms

The only washrooms that were in service on the grounds in the past were small portable toilets that were rented by the Optimist Club on an annual basis. However, in 2011, the Club did not rent portable washrooms for the Fairgrounds. The options available to the Township are to either assume the practice of renting portable toilets on an annual basis or plan to install a permanent washroom facility at a strategic location on the property. The construction of a permanent washroom facility that is designed to be accessible for persons with disabilities is considered to be the desirable option.

- Adapt Floor of Former Florence Community Centre

The third proposed infrastructure improvement involves adapting the floor of the former Florence Community Centre for recreational use. Since this concrete pad has many potential uses, consideration should be given to preparing this space for multi-uses. For example, the pad could be used for tennis, basketball and volleyball as tennis, portable basketball and volleyball nets can be purchased and stored at the Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre.

The floor should be first be finished with an epoxy base to protect the concrete floor from cracking. The floor can then be potentially used for the following sporting activities:

1. Tennis Court:

The floor of the former Florence Community Centre is the ideal size for a children's scale tennis court. Establishing this court, with a functional net and proper fencing around the area would provide an excellent venue to encourage children to play at the Fairgrounds.

2. Basketball

Basketball has always been a popular sport with people of all ages. Purchasing and setting up portable nets and using the floor of the former Florence Community Centre would be a cost effective sporting option for the Fairgrounds.

3. Volleyball

Volleyball is another recreational sport that is cost effective. With the purchase of a net and installation of posts, pick up games of volleyball can be played.

4. Shuffleboard

Shuffleboard is another option to consider because it is non-impact physical activity that appeals to all ages, especially adults and seniors. Line painting would be required and associated equipment would need to be purchased.

Cost Estimates:

The cost estimate for the hockey benches would be \$1,500. That includes benches that are 18' long, include backrests, and can safely sit 12 players. A washroom facility on a septic tank, with sinks, and flushable toilets would cost between \$50,000-\$75,000. In preparing the new multi-use pad, the cost of purchasing portable nets for tennis, volleyball and basketball and the painting of lines on the concrete pad would cost approximately \$2,000.

6.3 Long Term Initiatives:

Long term initiatives can be considered for implementation between five and ten years following adoption of this Master Plan.

- **Renovate the baseball diamonds (infields, lighting standards and lights, backstops, dugouts, benches)**
- **Install a walking path/trail around and through the Fairgrounds**
- **Pave the entire parking lot**

Rationale for Improvements:

- **Ball Diamond Improvements**

The baseball diamonds need a complete upgrade. Currently, only the main diamond has lighting and only half of them are operational. The lighting standards have been inspected by Jim Sanders of Playchek Services Inc. on December 19, 2013, and he has recommended that they be removed in a timely manner. Since there is no present demand for lighted ball diamonds, it is not recommended that the lights be replaced at this time. It is recommended that consideration be given to retaining the light standards and ensure they are safe to provide auxiliary for other community events.

The ball diamonds also need new fencing. Without improvements to the ball diamonds, they will continue to deteriorate resulting in potential safety hazards. If the municipality wishes to see the diamonds used on a regular basis they need to be upgraded.

- **Walking Trails**

One of the best forms of exercise for adults and seniors is walking. The preliminary results of the Community Needs Survey indicate a strong desire for the creation of a walking trail on the Fairgrounds. A trail is something that can be created that benefits persons of all ages. The overall length of the walking trail could encompass the entire Fairgrounds area as well as bisect it.

The installation of a walking trail/pathway around the perimeter of and through the property will help to encourage persons to exercise in a park setting. Studies have shown that walking is considered to be one of the most popular recreational activities. Installation of an appropriate walking trail should be considered for the Fairgrounds.

Cost Estimates:

For a complete renovation of the diamonds including lighting improvements at the main diamond, improved fencing, protective backstops, improved pitching mounds, and portable bleachers is estimated to cost between \$50,000 and \$110,000.

The estimated cost for installing a walking trail is approximately \$22.00 per twenty linear foot section.

7.0 Promoting the Fairgrounds

The Fairgrounds along with the new Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre should be promoted as a package. The Community Centre marketing plan should be designed to promote the entire Fairgrounds property and all of the facilities. The Fairgrounds and Community Centre can jointly become an attractive destination package for family, business and group events.

8.0 Conclusions

In conclusion, this Master Plan provides Township Council with a document that focuses on improvements that can be implemented to enhance the Fairgrounds. It is hoped that the master plan will provide a guiding document designed to return the Fairgrounds to a first class recreational facility for the Township and surrounding communities. It is also intended that the master plan provide the municipality with a basis for making funding applications to applicable grant programs in the future. The recommendations outlined in this plan include a phased timeline for implementation.

The Township should also enter into discussions with the Florence and Sydenham District Optimist Club with respect to assuming full responsibility for the management and maintenance of all facilities at the Fairgrounds. In addition, the Township should develop and adopt a Parks and Recreation By-Law that would not only be applicable to the Fairgrounds property but all other municipal parks.

The Marketing Plan for the Dawn-Euphemia Community Centre should also promote other facilities located at the Fairgrounds which collectively would provide opportunities for the Township to promote the entire grounds for various family, business and group functions.

The Administrator-Clerk should review this Plan annually with Council in November/December.

